Key leaflet: Teaching struggling readers

‘Schools had devoted a considerable amount of time to reading. However, few had developed a clearly articulated policy, based on a detailed understanding of how pupils become readers.’

Ofsted 2009: English at the crossroads

Introduction

Teaching reading effectively to all pupils has to be one of the highest priorities for secondary English teachers, but knowing what works best across a wide ability range can present particular challenges.

Pupils who struggle to develop as readers – typically, those who have achieved a level 3 or below in Assessing Pupils’ Progress (APP) reading assessments – will find it hard to cope independently with the reading challenges of secondary schooling and see reading as a problem rather than as a tool for learning or a source of pleasure and satisfaction.

Many pupils transfer to secondary school having achieved level 4 in reading in the National Curriculum tests at the end of primary school. Although transferring to secondary school will inevitably cause some disruption in learning, these pupils will generally make a smooth transition, and by the end of the first term in Year 7 most are performing at the levels they had achieved the previous year.

Approximately 20 per cent of pupils start secondary school having achieved level 3 in reading in Key Stage 2 tests. These pupils may be able to read age-appropriate texts satisfactorily, but they may lack experience in reading across the curriculum and in using inference and deduction. These pupils are vulnerable learners at the start of secondary school. They can easily lose confidence and, without focused support, the gap between their performance and the demands of the curriculum can widen.

Over 5 per cent of pupils enter secondary school at National Curriculum level 2 or below. These pupils are still struggling to master the core skills of reading – word recognition and swift comprehension – and they will not be able independently to read texts in books, on screen and on worksheets. Many of these pupils are demoralised about their ability to improve in reading, and some have given up the challenge.
There is a danger that struggling readers are perceived just in terms of the skills they lack. This can lead to a reductive curriculum, where isolated teaching is used to ‘plug the skills gaps’. However, if these pupils are to make progress and develop as readers, they need very positive reading experiences that stress the purpose and enjoyment of reading as well as the skills component. Few secondary English teachers had the opportunity in their initial training to spend much time familiarising themselves with the principles of how pupils learn to read; yet many now find themselves in teaching situations where the pupils need specific help in decoding the words on the page.

In primary schools, pupils who struggle with reading are given books to read that have been carefully chosen to be appropriate to their level; are rarely expected to read something that is too difficult for them; and possibly have some support from a teaching assistant (TA) throughout the school day. After six weeks of holiday, probably doing no reading or writing whatsoever (and worrying about starting secondary school) these pupils, arrive in Key Stage 3 to find themselves in learning situations which are considerably more demanding and possibly less supportive than they have been used to and certainly where it is much more challenging for teachers to tailor a curriculum to meet their needs.
## What are the key issues or challenges for me/us?

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<td>Could I/we find more ways to support the self-esteem of struggling readers?</td>
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<td>How effectively is intervention linked with classroom learning?</td>
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**What skills are involved in reading?**

In order to be able to read a text a pupil needs to be able to:

- recognise the letters instantly
- assign sounds to individual letters and to combinations of letters
- blend the sounds smoothly to make a word
- recognise some high-usage words quickly
- understand the significance of punctuation
- recognise and use patterns in language to read and understand new words
- simultaneously understand what they are reading as they read.

Pupils in Key Stage 3 performing below level 4 may have knowledge gaps in any or all of the above skills. For progress in reading to take place, all those working with underperforming pupils, both the specialists in special needs departments and teachers in the mainstream classrooms, need to understand where individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses lie.

Finding out where pupils are in terms of word-recognition skills can be done through group observation or individual analysis using a diagnostic approach such as a running record based on miscue analysis. Go to [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies) and search for FLS.

**Teaching word recognition**

If pupils are to achieve the reading fluency upon which comprehension depends, they must acquire instant recognition of an increasing number of high-frequency words.

When pupils are secure with the relationship between the 26 letters of the alphabet and the 44 phonemes they represent, then their speedy blending of the phonemes will, through practice, develop into instant recognition. However, in some words the match between phonemes and letters is unusual and these words will need a different teaching and learning approach if they are to become instantly recognisable.

1. If a word is phonically regular, that is the match between the phonemes and the letters is straightforward (for example ‘went’ has four letters and four phonemes), then the quickest route to teaching the word is by blending the phonemes.

2. In some words the grapheme–phoneme correspondence is less straightforward, for example ‘train’ has five letters but only four phonemes (t/r/ai/n). However, the letters ‘ai’ representing the ‘ay’ sound, do so in many other words and this is one of the associations pupils are taught when they learn to recognise the 44 phonemes in English, so this word (and others like it) should also be taught using a phonic route and blending the phonemes.
3. In a limited number of words the match between the phonemes and the letters is irregular. For example, in the word ‘they’, the ‘ay’ phoneme is made with ‘ey’; in the word ‘said’, the short vowel ‘e’ sound is made with ‘ai’. These irregular, or ‘tricky’, words should be taught using multi-sensory techniques involving closely studying the appearance of the word and using the letter names to rote learn the spelling.

What subject knowledge about phonics do I need?

English is a difficult language to learn to read and spell because of the discrepancy between the number of letters in the alphabet and the number of sounds (phonemes) they represent.

There are **44 separate phonemes** and, it is generally agreed, there are over 200 ways of spelling those 44 phonemes!

There are **24 consonant phonemes**. For 18 of those consonants there is a fairly close match between the letter and the sound it represents in a word.

There are six further consonant phonemes: ‘sh’, ‘ch’, ‘th’ (as in ‘thin’), ‘th’ (as in ‘then’), ‘ng’ and the sound ‘zh’ (as in television). These are digraphs, that is two letters making one sound.

There are **20 vowel phonemes**:

- five short vowels (cat, pet, big, dog, nut)
- five long vowel phonemes where the vowel ‘says the letter name’ (ay, ee, igh, oa, oo).

Some long vowel phonemes are called ‘split vowel digraphs’ where the two letters of a digraph, for example ‘ie’, are ‘split’ by a consonant, so that in the word ‘kite’ the long vowel phoneme ‘ie’ is split by the consonant ‘t’.

There are nine further vowel phonemes:
‘ar’ (car), ‘er’ (term), ‘or’ (port), ‘oo’ (book), ‘ow’ (how), ‘oi’ (boy), ‘air’ (hair), ‘ear’ (hear), ‘ure’ (pure).

There is one unstressed vowel which represents the sound ‘uh’ as in ‘letter’.
Sounding phonemes

It is not easy to enunciate separate phonemes clearly, without inadvertently adding an unstressed vowel. For example, the consonant phoneme ‘b’ may inaccurately be pronounced ‘ber’. It is important that all adults working with pupils needing support with phonological knowledge strive to produce as clear a representation of the phoneme as possible.

Correct articulation would be:

- **sssss not** suh
- **mmm not** muh
- **t not** tuh
- **sh not** shuh.

When teachers and TAs help pupils to read and spell words by blending and segmenting the individual phonemes, it is important that the phonemes identified are those that are heard in the word. So, for example, the phonemes in ‘take’ are ‘t’ ‘ay’ ‘k’ and pupils should be supported in their spelling by having these phonemes sounded for them. Then it may be necessary to check that the pupil is aware that the long vowel ‘ay’ phoneme in the word ‘take’ is made with the split vowel digraph ‘a-e’.

In primary school, pupils are taught phonic knowledge in a systematic way:

1. to blend CVC (consonant–vowel–consonant) words, for example ‘b/i/g’ ‘ch/i/p’
2. to recognise all 44 phonemes
3. to blend adjacent consonants (e.g. bl, br, dr, sp, tr)
4. to know all long vowel phonemes.

Although all pupils are taught the phoneme–letter correspondences in primary school, not all pupils are receptive to that teaching at that time and these pupils will continue to need specific phonic teaching in secondary school.

It is recommended that:

- the phonic knowledge of Key Stage 3 pupils who are underperforming in reading and spelling is assessed against the four stages listed above
- strengths and weaknesses in phonics are identified
- teaching, both in the classroom and in special needs departments, takes account of appropriate next steps in learning based on the evidence.

**Note:** Automatic and effortless reading is the ultimate goal, therefore the phonics sessions should always lead towards application of the learning through reading in a range of contexts.
Teaching comprehension

Assessing pupils’ comprehension diagnostically is often best done through talk and questioning in a small group or individual situation. (Guided reading provides a particularly helpful context.) The issue is not whether the pupils can read aloud, but whether they can understand what they have read.

Questions to probe pupils’ understanding of the text should assess their thinking at three levels:

1. **Literal:** pupils can recall information that is directly stated in the text.

2. **Deductive or inferential:** pupils can work out answers by reading between the lines, by combining information found in different parts of the text and by relating the information on the page to their own understanding of the world.

3. **Evaluative or responsive:** pupils go beyond the text by, for example, thinking whether the text achieves its purpose, or making connections with other texts.

Pupils in Key Stage 3 should be expected to be able to think about the text at all three levels. Their targets should reflect the levels of their understanding and help them to move from the literal to the evaluative.
The simple view of reading

In an Appendix to the Rose report (Independent review of the teaching of early reading, 2006), a quadrant diagram is used to emphasise how the dual components of the reading process, ‘word recognition’ and ‘language comprehension’, are essential to developing fluent and successful reading, and both require specific kinds of teaching. Securing pupils’ comprehension, which is an accepted element of primary and secondary English teaching, needs to be grounded in effective word recognition. That is why the teaching of word-recognition skills, which is seen as fundamental in primary education, is also important for struggling readers in secondary schools. Vocabulary development, too, is significant since pupils’ understanding, as well as their confidence, may be impaired if they do not know the meaning of a word. Teaching word-recognition skills involves extending vocabulary as well as decoding words.

Mapping pupils at various points on the word recognition/language comprehension quadrant will help to identify their needs.
Pupil 1: Diagnosis – Good comprehension, but poor word recognition

This pupil could be quite competent orally and may appear to be better at reading than he or she really is. Such pupils have probably missed out on some crucial element of phonics instruction. They may be able to blend three phonemes such as ‘c/a/t’, but they may be less secure with long vowel phonemes. For example, they may know that double ‘o’ makes the sound ‘oo’ in the word ‘fool’, but they may not realise that the same sound is also made by ‘ue’ (blue), ‘ew’ (blew), ‘oe’ (shoe), ‘ough’ (through), ‘wo’ (two) and ‘o’ (to).

Inadequate phonic knowledge will tempt these pupils to rely on guessing unfamiliar words. In fiction reading this may not reveal itself as a serious gap, but when reading non-fiction, where even good guesses are not good enough, these pupils can rapidly lose the sense of what they are trying to read.

Action:

Grapheme sort:

- Challenge pupils to generate rhyming words, for example, words that rhyme with ‘white’: night, bite, flight, bright, write, light, tight, fight, might, quite, fright, height. Note: It can be helpful to have a strip of consonant letters for pupils to refer to assist them to generate rhyming words by working through the letters in turn to see if they create a word.
  
- Write each word on a small card and stick on a board (or use an interactive whiteboard). Ask the pupils to move the words to group them according to the letter patterns (‘ite’, ‘ight’, ‘eight’).
  
- Challenge them to identify which letters are making the long vowel ‘igh’ sound in each word. (Ensure they realise that in the ‘ite’ words the long vowel sound is represented by ‘i’– ‘e’). Ask them which column the words ‘knight’ and ‘kite’ should go in.
  
- Select the longest column (the ‘ight’ words). Tell the pupils to study each word in turn, then remove it from the board and challenge them to spell the word from memory. Check each pupil has correctly spelt all the words.
  
- For homework, tell them to practise further spelling the ‘ight’ words using techniques such as Look–Say–Cover–Say–Remember–Write–Check–Cover–Write quickly.
  
- Later, set them the challenge of learning the ‘other’ set of words making the long vowel ‘ie’ sound (white, kite, quite, bite).
  
- Other useful words for rhyming are: train, made, sail, face, gate.
Syllabification:

- Pupils who have good comprehension but poor word-recognition skills may lack strategies for reading polysyllabic words. Helping them to break down longer words into manageable chunks will speed up their reading and increase their accuracy.

- Explain the principle of syllables: a syllable is the ‘beat’ in a word and every syllable has a vowel. (Explain that sometimes the letter ‘y’ functions as a vowel – luck/y.)

- Get pupils to clap out the number of beats in the name of their favourite band or TV programme. Do the same with a few lines of a text.

- Double check that pupils are confident at recognising ‘short’ and ‘long’ vowels.

- Introduce the concept of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ syllables:
  - open syllables end with a vowel and generally that vowel will be ‘long’
  - closed syllables end with a consonant and generally that vowel will be ‘short’.

- Write some monosyllabic words on the board, for example he, sat, go, off, and, back, from, them, which, etc. Get the pupils to work out whether the vowel is long or short. Does the generalisation work?

- Write some polysyllabic words on the board, for example into, going, began, getting. Get the pupils to work out the syllable divisions and then see if the open syllables are ‘long’ and the closed syllables ‘short’.

- Point out that in some words there is a consonant at the end of the syllable but that consonant is part of the vowel sound, for example, ‘slowly’ – the long vowel ‘o’ sound is represented by the letters ‘ow’, so the ‘w’ in that word is part of the vowel and is not functioning as a consonant. The same would apply to ‘frightening’ where the ‘gh’ is part of the long vowel ‘igh’ sound.

- Progress to more challenging polysyllabic words, for example, suddenly, shouted, playground, jacket, animal, delighted, running, hoping, disobey, relative, family, vegetable, wickedness, disgusting, shakily, geography, happiness, laziness, automatic, inconvenient. Can the pupils work out the syllable breaks and identify whether the vowel in each syllable is long or short?

- Like all ‘rules’ in English there are many exceptions! Encourage pupils to collect examples of exceptions and see if they can work out any common patterns; for example where the vowel is unstressed it is sounded as a short ‘uh’, but it could be represented by any of the five vowels, so this can ‘muddy the waters’.

- Note: Encourage colleagues from other subject specialisms to prepare laminated bookmarks for each pupil requiring support. The bookmarks should list the key vocabulary for a topic divided into syllable breaks: hy/dro/chlor/ic ac/id, con/tour lines, di/ges/tion, mul/tip/lic/a/tion.
Note: With all the above activities it is good practice to encourage pupils to explain to a buddy what they have done in each part of the task and why they have done it. This making explicit of newly taught skills helps to consolidate learning.

**Pupil 2: Diagnosis – Good word recognition, but poor comprehension**

This is probably a pupil with limited reading experiences and poor oral vocabulary. Such pupils have ‘cracked the code’ of reading, but the effort of decoding may distract them from the overall purpose of reading – making sense of the printed word. Good readers know when the text does not make sense and reread, but these pupils will often continue decoding even though they have lost the thread of what they are reading.

Some English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils fall into this category. They have sorted out the relationship between letters and sounds, but lack the reading experience and vocabulary to comprehend simultaneously as they read.

**Action:**

**A range of reading experiences**

- Try to ensure that your classes have a balance of reading experiences. Pupils who are below National Curriculum level 3 in Key Stage 3 will need to have many texts read to them (this is what happens with pupils at the same level in Key Stage 1). We should not assume that reading to pupils makes them lazy about improving their own reading skills. They are learning many things about language by hearing texts read aloud to them:
  - they hear a good model of reading pace, fluency, and intonation
  - they hear how written language is organised into sentences
  - they can concentrate upon the sense of the text without being distracted by the challenges of decoding the words
  - they may well be more willing to discuss the text after hearing it. This will increase their comprehension and their expectation that texts should make sense, which will benefit their understanding when they read independently.

**Hearing texts read aloud**

- Pupils with good word recognition but poor comprehension need to have maximum exposure to hearing whole texts read to them. This can be achieved by:
  - using TA time to read to and with these pupils in small groups
  - using CD-ROMs of texts (either shop-bought or using an audio CD-ROM burner).
• As the pupils listen to the text, challenge them to stop the CD-ROM three times during the course of the listening session and to devise a question for other pupils to answer.

• When the text has been heard, invite pupils to ask one another their questions and to rate the quality of the answers.

Making a recording

• Direct pupils to work with a buddy and to choose either a poem or a short story to prepare for a presentation. The text should not be challenging for the pupil to read, as the focus is on making the sense evident to an audience as they read.

• Give them preparation time, then get them to record their reading performance either on to cassette or CD-ROM.

• Let buddies swap recordings.

Buddy reading – same ability

• When there is reading to be done in class, team up pairs of pupils who find comprehension a challenge. One pupil reads the first paragraph and the buddy summarises what the paragraph is about. Then they swap roles.

Buddy reading – different abilities

• Pair an above-average reader with a pupil who needs support. Encourage them to read the page/worksheet together.

Prepared reading
(either by teacher to whole class or by TA to support group)

• Before pupils read independently, introduce the text to them so they have the big picture of the context. For example, say: ‘This page describes how our weather system works. It explains how the world’s weather is created by the heat energy from the sun. Find the words “weather” and “heat energy”. Let’s look at the diagram first…’, etc.

Signposts

• Pupils with poor comprehension skills may not understand the ‘signposts’ in texts. It is worth ensuring that they all understand:
  — alphabetical order (and its uses)
  — how to use a contents page and glossary
  — how headings and subheadings work
  — why a word might be in bold type
  — how graphs, diagrams, labels and charts work.
Devising questions

- After sharing a text with pupils (either by reading it to them, reading it with them, or, after prepared reading, letting them read it independently), guide the pupils to create five questions to investigate the text. These should be:
  - two literal questions
  - one inferential question
  - two personal response questions.
- Check that the questions can be answered by the text. (For homework, ask pupils to write the answers to three of the questions.)

Pupil 3: Weak comprehension and poor word recognition

This pupil will have transferred to Key Stage 3 at below National Curriculum level 3. Such pupils cannot recognise many of the high frequency words and they may have very limited (or muddled) phonic knowledge. This might lead them to try to assign a sound to every letter, for example n-i-g-h-t, not recognising the trigraph -igh. Many of these pupils have a very poor attitude to reading and a very low opinion of themselves as readers.

Action:

Teaching ‘tricky’ words

Handwriting

- First ensure that the pupils can identify each letter by its name and that they can form the letter in handwriting accurately. (Note: This is not an issue of handwriting style – joined or printed, but refers to the formation of each letter in the correct direction and sequence of movements (For example, starting the letter ‘e’ with the horizontal stroke in the middle; starting ‘h’ at the top with a downward stroke and then coming back up the line to arch over to complete the letter.)

Visualising

- Select an appropriate target of useful words that will be taught using visualising techniques. For example, was, have, said, they, come, could, would, only, our, some, their, want, what, put, always, asked, any, does, other, won’t, friend, great, because, believe, nothing, people, sure, once. Teach them in batches of three and encourage the pupils to choose which three they will elect to learn.
  - Write one of the focus words on the board, saying the names of the letters as you write it.
  - Point at each letter in turn and ask the pupils to repeat them.
— Wipe the board and ask the pupils to dictate each letter as you write it.

— Ask the pupils if they can think of ways of remembering the spelling, for example remembering the ‘ould’ sequence of letters by saying ‘O U Lucky Duck’.

— Give the pupils ten seconds to study the word before you wipe the board and challenge them to write the word on a spelling jotter.

— Ask them to judge whether they think they have spelled the word correctly. They should put a dot under any letter which they think they may have got wrong.

— Write the word again and ask them to check their spelling.

— Any pupil who has made a slip should cross out the incorrect version then study the word again for ten seconds before having another go.

— Once everyone has the word correct, they should turn over their jotter and write the word again three times.

— Tell the pupils to put away their spelling practice sheets. Check the board is clean and recap on the learning:
  - What word have they learned?
  - How many letters are there in the word?
  - Repeat the letters.
  - Ask them how they will remember to spell the word in future.

— Tell the pupils to add the word to their list of ‘Words I am learning to spell’.

— Repeat the process for the remaining two selected words.

— At the start of the next spelling session, challenge the pupils to write the words most recently learnt. If spelt correctly, they may add them to another list: Words I can spell. If the word is misspelled, they should write it again in the ‘Words I am learning to spell’ list.
Unlearning and re-learning

Pupils sometimes misspell common words because they have spelt those words incorrectly for a long time and now have the pattern for that incorrect spelling in their hand and eye. We need to encourage them to look afresh at these words and re-learn them correctly.

- Write the tricky word for the pupils, saying the names of the letters as you write.
- Go over the ‘problem’ letters in highlighter pen to draw attention to them. For example, in the word ‘said’, go over the ‘a’ and ‘i’ in highlighter.
- Discuss with the pupils why you have done this and why it might help them to spell the word correctly.
- Get them to write the word ‘said’ and go over the ‘ai’ in highlighter.
- Using some of the visualising techniques outlined above, teach the pupils to study the word and write it from memory.

Quick reading

Some pupils do not believe that it is possible for them to look at words and swiftly recognise them. Others may be able to recognise words in a word list but not be confident to read them in sentences. In order for such pupils to experience quick reading, the text needs to be easy. Rather than use very simple books which might not be suitable for the pupils’ age and interest, it can be quite effective to make up ten sentences and to write them separately on strips of card. Devise the sentences with the pupils to reflect their interests, for example:

- I will play football at lunchtime.
- I came to school by bus.
- I like maths, but I don’t like French.

- Set a timer for 20 seconds. Ask the pupils to predict if you can read all ten sentences correctly, without any mistakes, so they can hear every word. Put yourself to the test!
- Invite pupils to take the challenge. Once a pupil has achieved the 20-second target, reduce the time limit. Remind them that each word must be clearly pronounced.
- In subsequent sessions, change one or two of the sentences.

Extending phonic knowledge

Pupils who have poor word-recognition skills probably do not have effective phonic knowledge. They may be able to blend CVC words but they may not be able to blend adjacent consonants at the start or end of a word, for example drop, step, hand, gift. Blending the sound from one consonant to another is a particular stage in phonic progression, and some pupils performing below National Curriculum level 3 may need further revision of this skill.
Blending consonants

- Select six words that start with two consonants, for example trip, grab, spin, clap, drop, step. (Note: Ensure the pupils are aware that the two consonants are two separate sounds which need to be blended smoothly together to read the word. They are not the same as consonant digraphs [see page 5] where the two consonants make one sound, for example ‘sh’, ‘ch’, ‘th’.

- Say each word and demonstrate spelling it, sounding the separate phonemes as you write the letters. When you have written it, blend the phonemes and say the whole word.

- Say one of the words and ask a pupil to sound out the separate phonemes as you write the letters. Read the whole word together.

- Reverse the roles and you say each phoneme in turn as they write them. Ask the pupils to blend each phoneme and read the word they have written.

- Dictate the six words and ask the pupils to spell them.

Recognising vowel digraphs

Many pupils who are performing at National Curriculum levels 1 or 2 in reading may not have grasped the principle of how combinations of letters may make one sound. They are often particularly confused about vowel digraphs (where two vowels make one sound).

- Introduce two contrasting vowel digraphs, for example ‘ee’ and ‘oa’ (or ‘ai’ and ‘ie’). Write six words for each digraph on the interactive whiteboard (or on separate cards), for example feel, feed, heel, feet, need, seed; coat, boat, foal, coal, road, soap.

- Concentrate first on just one of the vowel digraphs. Sound out the phonemes in each of the six words in turn (f/ee/l, f/ee/d, etc.). Ask the pupils to write the words.

- Reverse the roles and this time ask the pupils to sound out the phonemes while you demonstrate writing the words.

- Do the same with the ‘other’ vowel digraph.

- Test the pupils by dictating the words for them to spell. Mix up the order so that they are not writing all the six ‘ee’ words first. It is important that each time they write the words they do so from memory (i.e. not copying), so ensure that they cannot see their earlier attempts at spelling the words.

- Make a grid of the 12 words randomly distributed. Challenge individual pupils to read all 12 words in 15 seconds.

Developing comprehension

All the actions suggested for Pupil 2 to develop comprehension will also be appropriate for Pupil 3.
Reading – the big picture

Inexperienced readers may have little idea what reading has to offer for them. They feel embarrassed by their lack of skills in reading and they have ‘switched off’. They would rather not go on trying at something they find so difficult. These pupils may lack the essential skills of reading, but they also lack interest and motivation, and just drilling them in the skills will only have limited success. Readers in all three of the categories above need to have positive experiences of reading in the classroom. This will include being read to, or sharing the reading of a text. English teachers are skilled at reading texts aloud to bring them alive for pupils, and some pupils will only have had that experience in the classroom.

Pupils underperforming in English also need plenty of opportunities to talk about texts. They may not be secure with all the skills of decoding, which may hamper their comprehension when reading independently, but they are able to follow and becoming engaged in texts which have been shared with them in the classroom. Only when pupils are able to move beyond literal comprehension into inferential and evaluative comprehension are they able to engage in the analyses of writers’ techniques and impact that are so important in the assessment of secondary English. Pupils’ range of reading is significant; the enjoyment of fiction is a formative experience, but every pupil also needs a repertoire of approaches for reading non-fiction, since non-fiction poses particular challenges in terms of content organisation, vocabulary, sentence structure, organisation and impact.

Reading partners

One way to widen the opportunities for pupils with literacy difficulties is to partner them with an older pupil in the school whose role is to read to them and talk about the texts shared together. Part of the session might involve the younger pupil reading to the older pupil, but it can be just as valuable to spend this time replicating the relaxed atmosphere at home, where an interested adult reads to a child and then talks about what has been read. The chances are that the pupils who face the greatest challenges in literacy have not come from homes where adults felt able to spend time sharing books together. Every time a struggling reader is ‘heard to read’, even with an admired older pupil, it is still making reading a kind of test. If we remove that pressure from the younger pupil, it might help them to see reading in a different light. Any progress we can make in the classroom regarding developing the skills of reading will only be as successful as the pupil’s attitude to reading allows. Sessions with the reading partner will also be ideal opportunities for pupils to extend their vocabulary and comprehend more complex texts. Developing comprehension skills in order to secure understanding is central. Many secondary schools have used the Reading Challenge as the basis of their reading partners. Go to www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies and search for Reading Challenge.
Effective practice

‘They just know that when they come to us they are going to enjoy lots of reading.’

**English subject leader in Devon 2009**

A prerequisite for progress is to have teachers who are themselves readers and who create positive attitudes to reading through the reading culture in the school and across the curriculum (see Key leaflet: *Promoting reading enthusiasm*).

The diagram below outlines an established and effective five-stage process for teaching struggling readers effectively.

[Diagram of a five-stage process: Identify pupils → Assess learning needs → Tailored teaching in main lessons → Assess progress against targets → Set curricular targets → Additional or alternative provision]
The five-stage process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 Identify pupils                                                     | 1. Draw on the image of struggling readers in the progression maps.  
2. Use APP to track pupil progress and to identify pupils who struggle.                                                                                           |
| 2 Assess learning needs and set curricular targets                   | 1. Recognise that needs may be attitudinal, not just academic.  
2. Establish specific areas for focus in teaching and assessment through using the English progression maps to identify relevant curricular targets.  
3. Identify any missing skills of word recognition and comprehension and teach them explicitly to support struggling readers.                                                                                                           |
| 3 Tailored teaching in main lessons                                  | 1. Help pupils (especially, but not only, boys) to feel better about themselves as readers.  
2. Use the Framework strands to plan for progression, with learning objectives and outcomes for struggling readers clearly indicated in the scheme of work and individual lesson plans.  
3. Use the contexts of modelled, shared, guided and independent reading to offer complementary opportunities in everyday (Wave 1) teaching which supports struggling readers towards independence.  
4. Draw on National Strategies materials such as *Literacy Plus* and *Targeting level 4: Teaching reading* and the progression maps to provide clear and appropriate lesson suggestions. |
| 4 Additional or alternative provision                                 | 1. Provide targeted intervention where this can accelerate progress through small-group and one-to-one support.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 5 Review progress                                                     | 1. Review existing practice.  
2. Plan for improvement.  
3. Create a more positive climate for reading.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
Stage 1: Identify pupils

Who are the struggling readers? This pen portrait describes some of the strengths of readers who nevertheless may still be struggling.

Budding readers: likely to be assessed as low level 2 in Key Stage 3

These readers are still in the process of learning the essential skills needed for reading. They may have a basic grasp of phonics although they probably struggle with some vowel digraphs. They are beginning to acquire strategies to read and work out the meaning of unfamiliar words that have regular patterns, but may still need support in choosing the most appropriate one to use. They are likely to be more confident when reading familiar texts where they can rely on recognising key words on sight.

These readers are learning to construct the meaning of simple texts. They are able to make plausible inferences, express some likes and dislikes about texts, and notice and say something about a text’s basic features. When reading aloud, they are likely to take account of simple punctuation to read with some expression.

These readers are likely still to need targets to take them to level 2 in some Assessment Focus (AF) areas.

Likely to be assessed as secure or high level 2 in Key Stage 3

These readers are in the process of developing and becoming more confident in using the basic skills needed for reading. They have strategies to read and work out the meaning of new and unfamiliar words including some that have complex patterns and their knowledge of phonics is more secure. Their reading of simple texts is generally accurate but they are easily baffled by subject-specific texts and unfamiliar vocabulary.

In their reading of simple texts, pupils will demonstrate some understanding. These readers express opinions about major events or ideas in stories, poems and non-fiction. At Key Stage 3, these readers are likely to have an understanding of how texts work which, because of some years of reading exposure, is likely to be more advanced than their ability to decode and read fluently for meaning.

These readers are likely to need targets to take them to level 3 in some AF areas.

Use APP

- Identify pupils who struggle to meet the APP level 3 or level 4 criteria for reading fluently and with understanding (AFs 1, 2 and 3 in particular).

- Listen to what these pupils say about reading and monitor their contributions in class.
Stage 2: Assess learning needs and set curricular targets

Learning needs are attitudinal and emotional as well as academic. Pupils (especially, but not only, boys) need to feel better about themselves as readers. Unless pupils find reading a source of pleasure and satisfaction we will never pass the ultimate test of our teaching of reading – whether pupils choose to read when no one is making them do so.

Effective teachers of reading recognise that the ability to decode text and orchestrate a range of other cues while reading are vital elements of the reading process, but unless pupils see themselves as readers these abilities are not enough to produce fluent, engaged and critical readers. We therefore need to do everything possible to build pupils’ self-esteem in relation to reading.

Establish specific areas for focus in teaching and assessment through using the English progression maps and APP materials to identify the problems and therefore the relevant curricular targets.

Identifying ‘layered’ curricular targets (i.e. small steps) to underpin Framework objectives can be done by using English progression maps linked with APP. It may also involve explicit attention to word-recognition and comprehension skills (see Stage 3 below).

English progression maps help teachers to recognise the characteristics of struggling readers and offer suggestions about specific teaching strategies and appropriate pupil targets. APP assessment guidelines sheets enable teachers to identify target AF areas and to monitor progress at the level of AFs. Such monitoring is important because it enables teachers and pupils to identify and to celebrate small steps of progress.

AFs for reading

Curricular targets identify the next crucial step in learning for a pupil or group of pupils. The APP assessment guidelines sheets enable teachers to identify target AF areas and choose appropriate curricular targets for pupils. All AFs are potentially relevant for all pupils, but while confident readers in Year 7 may well be concentrating on AFs 4–7, struggling readers are more likely to need to secure AFs 1, 2 and 3.

AF1 – use a range of strategies, including accurate decoding of text, to read for meaning

AF2 – understand, describe, select or retrieve information, events or ideas from texts and use quotation and reference to text

AF3 – deduce, infer or interpret information, events or ideas from texts

An example, taken from the progression maps, of a personal target for a pupil working towards level 3 in Key Stage 3 who has difficulty in understanding implied meanings (AF3) might be:

Use at least two of the following reading strategies: questioning a text, making mental pictures based on what I read, predicting what might happen next in a text.
Identify any missing skills of word recognition and comprehension and teach them explicitly to support struggling readers.

‘Different kinds of teaching are needed to develop word recognition skills from those that are needed to foster the comprehension of written and spoken language…’

Rose report, 2006, Independent review of the teaching of early reading, Appendix 1, paragraph 18, page 77

Research suggests that different sets of skills and knowledge underpin the development of word recognition from those that underpin the development of language comprehension. Understanding written text fully is not possible unless we can read the words which compose the text, but being able to read all the words in a written text does not guarantee that the text will be understood.

Phonological skills and knowledge are crucial to the development of word recognition, while semantics and syntax make a greater contribution to comprehension. These two dimensions also interact and affect each other. Pupils are not necessarily going to be equally proficient in each dimension, and we need to be able to represent this possible divergence of skills.

**Targets for independent reading**

Teachers may wish to set targets for pupils’ independent personal reading which encourage pupils in relation to the amount, range or level of challenge of their reading.

Some suggested target areas for pupils’ independent reading:

- enjoying a widening range of fiction
- talking with others about books that they have enjoyed
- recognising that reading can be useful and interesting
- trying to persuade others to read a particular text
- knowing where to look for reading material
- knowing how to select material that will be appropriate and interesting
- selecting and reading independently a range of fiction and non-fiction texts
- keeping a reading journal with comments and quotations and sharing this with others
- evaluating their reading habits: their strengths as readers and areas they would like to develop.
Stage 3: Tailored teaching in main lessons

Help pupils to feel better about themselves as readers

Where pupils are motivated to make progress as readers it is usually because teachers have created a positive classroom climate and provided engaging, interactive activities. Such activities, appropriate for girls as well as boys, include:

- building pupils’ self-esteem in any way possible, for example valuing the kinds of reading they do, whether or not their preferred texts are part of the ‘school’ canon
- linking reading to the experiences of pupils and the community, or to workplace contexts for reading
- developing reading skills through using picture books which are enjoyably non-threatening to less-confident readers
- encouraging pupils to talk about texts before asking them to write about them
- having a range of literary and non-literary texts in the classroom and encouraging personal choice
- using Directed Activities Related to Texts (DARTS) such as word deletion, which are interactive and engaging
- ensuring that group reading includes guided reading
- encouraging reciprocal reading
- planning for the dramatic exploration of texts
- making sure that texts include screen texts as well as printed texts.

Plan for progression based on Framework strands, with learning objectives and outcomes for struggling readers clearly indicated in the scheme of work and individual lesson plans.

Planning the effective teaching of reading for struggling readers is best done by starting with the interactive revised Framework for secondary English. This enables teachers to use their professional judgement and local knowledge when taking account of pupils’ prior learning, their current position and the progress they need to make. It also links learning objectives constructively with APP assessment outcomes. Planning for struggling readers will usually focus on strand 5.1 Developing and adapting active reading skills and strategies, since that is the area needing explicit attention. Further guidance can be found in Teaching for progression: Reading by going to www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies and searching using DCSF ref: 00750-2008PDF-EN-01.

Use the contexts of shared, guided and independent reading to offer complementary opportunities in everyday teaching (Wave 1) which support struggling readers towards independence.
Shared/modelled reading, guided reading and individual reading are all important. As shown below, they represent three stages in the movement from dependence via interdependence to independence for the developing reader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole class</th>
<th>Modelling explanation demonstration by the teacher</th>
<th>Dependent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole class</td>
<td>Shared work involving pupils</td>
<td>Interdependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher works with small groups</td>
<td>Guided work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils work without teacher support</td>
<td>Individual, paired or group work</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teaching approaches**

Intervention can take place within the classroom as well as outside it. Tailored teaching in mainstream lessons should complement tuition which is offered under Wave 3 provision. (Resources for intervention are listed later.)

Struggling readers are supported by the explicit teaching of the skills and strategies below (which are needed by all readers) across a range of texts and learning contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What readers need to do</th>
<th>How this might be taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Become confident readers who have strategies for reading a range of types of text | * Support reading through provision of classroom book boxes with a range of fiction and information texts.  
* Provide classroom time for personal reading.  
* Introduce approaches which accelerate the number of books read through a competitive dimension.  
* Focus on recognising and praising what pupils do well when reading. |
<p>| Skim: to glance quickly through a passage to get the gist of it | * Give pupils a few minutes to look through a newspaper to note its stance, or glance at subheadings in a book. |
| What readers need to do                                      | How this might be taught                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|========================================================================================|
| Scan: search for specific information                       | • Give pupils a limited time for looking up a telephone number, finding a date or fact in a longer piece of text. |
| Recognise an increasingly complex range of words            | • Teach vocabulary through shared reading and building word walls of interesting vocabulary which pupils have met in their reading. |
| Understand a range of increasingly complex texts            | • Teach the use of context cues and of monitoring meaning by rereading (as a reminder or to locate information) to confirm understanding. |
| Ask their own questions of a text                           | • Establish the classroom routine (especially in guided work) of following reading with questions from the pupils rather than from the teacher. |
| Relate texts to their own experience and previous reading experience | • Activate prior knowledge through talk.                                                    |
| Appreciate the ways in which structure can contribute to meaning | • Analyse texts into story, grammar and non-fiction genre components.                      |
|                                                            | • Use story maps, story shapes and story charts. After reading, demonstrate how to make the structure of particular stories explicit through drawing a 'map' of events in a story. Ask pupils to work collaboratively to map other stories and make comparisons between them. |
| Develop their personal views about books                    | • Encourage readers to talk about texts with their peers, using structured speaking and listening activities with clear outcomes in terms of reading objectives. |
| Increasingly grasp key meanings to identify a writer’s line of argument | • Ask pupils to pick out core points and to provide subheadings.                             |
|                                                            | • Teach pupils how to write a summary for a specific purpose or audience.                  |
| Deepen imaginative engagement with texts                    | • Encourage visualisation: construction of mental images during reading.                  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What readers need to do</th>
<th>How this might be taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explore character, theme, the writer’s technique and language</td>
<td>• Use drama for reading to underpin engagement with and exploration of layers of meaning within texts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Read between the lines (inference and deduction)                                        | • Distinguish between inference and deduction.  
• Use explicit teaching and demonstration of active reading strategies such as dramatic enactment, hot-seating, thought bubbling (when someone stands behind a character holding a thought bubble of what that character might be thinking). |
| Be confident and independent in choosing and interpreting texts                        | • Make time for the discussion of personal reading and for building and applying critical skills.                                                                                                                          |
| Understand the structure of texts                                                      | • Plan interactive activities which enable pupils to sort, categorise, explore and respond to texts at word, sentence and whole-text level.                                                                               |
| Know how to find information                                                           | • Revise the use of contents pages and indexes.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Know which texts might be useful for a particular task, audience or purpose             | • Give groups the same task, but for different audiences and compare the texts they choose.                                                                                                                              |
| Know how to tell fact from opinion                                                     | • Talk through examples of both fact and opinion during guided reading, and go on to explore the intended effect on the reader.                                                                                         |
| Make notes in order to record information from a range of sources                      | • Model note-making and highlighting (annotation) during shared work.                                                                                                                                                 |
Using TAs wisely

Some teachers will have in-class assistance for some pupils. It is important that this extra expertise is used effectively. Many struggling readers resort to one strategy: when faced with a task they cannot complete independently – they wait to be helped. This passive mode typifies their response to most tasks in class. They prevaricate and the TA, in order to keep the pupil or pupils up to speed with the rest of the class, may resort to providing answers themselves.

When planning for the range of abilities in a class it is advisable to specifically plan for the TA’s role. This role might be:

- rephrasing the task or breaking it down into smaller units so that the pupils understand what is expected of them
- paired reading of the text with the pupils. This requires both adult and pupil(s) to read simultaneously
- reminding pupils how they can be independent learners – using word banks, writing frames, etc.
- setting very clear tasks for the pupils, for example ‘You need to write two sentences about what the character is feeling at this point’.
- orally rehearsing sentences with pupils before they write them so that:
  — they plan what they are going to write before they start writing
  — the TA can help shape the answers into quality sentences
- on a worksheet or a photocopiable page, using highlighter pen to indicate the main content of a sentence or paragraph.

Note: All the suggestions regarding how comprehension can be enhanced would be suitable roles for TAs to adopt. However, this will only occur if teachers give clear directions to direct TA time.

Many of the actions outlined from page 9 following ‘The simple view of reading’ would also be appropriate for TAs to undertake. In particular:

- grapheme sort
- syllabification
- reading aloud to pupils
- devising questions
- monitoring handwriting
- visualising
- extending phonic knowledge.

TAs may sometimes feel that all they can do is complete the work for the pupil, because the teacher has not clarified their role or indeed acknowledged that some of the assistance will require the TA and pupil to talk.
**Stage 4: Additional or alternative provision**

Provide targeted intervention (Waves 2 and 3) where this can accelerate progress through small-group and one-to-one support.

The resources available for second and third wave intervention (i.e. for small groups or one-to-one) in English include the following:

**Literacy progress units**

A suite of units designed to be used selectively to address the specific needs of small groups of pupils working towards level 4. The three reading units are:

- Information retrieval: extracting and evaluating information from a range of non-literary sources: *Literacy progress unit: Information retrieval*

- Reading between the lines: using inference and deduction in interpreting literary texts: *Literacy progress unit: Reading between the lines*

- Phonics: applying knowledge of phonics in their own writing: *Literacy progress unit: Phonics*.

**Reading Challenge**

Reading Challenge is designed to help pupils whose reading skills are below expectations for their age. The scheme aims to motivate weak readers and coach them to make progress on a specific target that has been identified through a diagnostic process.

**One-to-one tuition**

Some pupils do not make the progress they need in a small-group or whole-class setting. Without an individualised approach it may be hard for these pupils to make the progress needed to achieve their full potential. To support the needs of this group, one-to-one tuition for pupils falling behind in English has been trialled as part of the Making Good Progress pilot and is now available for Key Stage 3.

The research report by Greg Brooks (*What works for pupils with literacy difficulties*, DCSF 00688-2007 BKT-EN), will be useful in helping schools identify specific interventions to meet the needs of those pupils.
## Stage 5: Review progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>By what date?</th>
<th>Completed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop an action plan with short and longer-term intentions to support struggling readers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create positive attitudes to reading through the reading culture in the school and across the curriculum.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broaden pupils’ reading experience of reading across the curriculum by giving reading a higher profile within all subjects.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop opportunities to engage with ‘real world reading’ by using texts which are part of the world outside the classroom, for example blogs, websites, newspapers, magazines, letters.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide CPD time on teaching reading for teachers and TAs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite writers into school to talk to and work with struggling readers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with parents on how they can support their child with reading.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>